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ABSTRACT

This paper, presented at the International Conference on Education for the Gifted, outlines points for consideration in designing a program for the education of gifted children in the Republic of South Africa. The points focus on the importance of mainstreaming, identification of giftedness, the need for close cooperation between home and school, and possibilities offered by new educational technology. To develop an educational system accommodating those points, a proposed system of education management has three levels: ministry of education of the central government, departments of education, and schools. The education of the gifted student can be accommodated within this structure through an enriched curriculum and stimulating educational climate, and through early identification at the preschool level. Teacher training for gifted student educators should involve identification procedures, teaching strategies, curriculum design, and design of individualized learning programs. Other important aspects of gifted education include school guidance, program evaluation, and creation of coordinating educational committees. (JDD)

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# Some Ideas on the Drawing Up of a Blueprint for the Education of Gifted Children in the Republic of South Africa

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# SOME IDEAS ON THE DRAWING UP OF A BLUEPRINT FOR THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN IN THE RSA

by

Dr J.G. Garbers*

## 1. INTRODUCTION : POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION WHEN DESIGNING A DISPENSATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN WITHIN THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE RSA

Mr Haasbroek gave us a historical outline of the ways in which educational opportunities have on the basis of differentiation been created to enable gifted pupils to actualize their individual abilities. He also referred to the research findings supporting the educational measures that have been taken for the education of gifted children. In view of the HSRC Investigation into Education and all the developments that have taken place since then culminating in the 1983 Government White Paper on Education Provision, and the legislation that has been passed and that is under consideration at the moment, this conference presents an opportune occasion to consider the future dispensation for the gifted child in our country.

There is a vast body of knowledge available on the basis of which a dispensation for the education of the gifted child should be planned. I should like to single out some points that should be borne in mind when considering such a dispensation:

(i) Mainstreaming of the education of the gifted child should be brought about;

(ii) probably only 2 - 5 % of all schoolchildren are gifted;

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*Dr Garbers speaks in his personal capacity and acknowledges the inputs of Mr J.B. Haasbroek and dr N.E. Roux of the Institute of Educational Research of the HSRC.

(iii) the correct identification of gifted children is of primary importance but it is a difficult, ongoing task that should be tackled on a team basis, particularly as far as the young, the disadvantaged and the handicapped child is concerned;

(iv) gifted children who are accommodated in the school system pose a severe educational challenge because of their unique individuality and educational needs in the intellectual, social and disciplinary fields;

(v) the fairly restricted spectrum of teaching strategies that most teachers can master and the problems they experience in individualizing their teaching;

(vi) the differences that exist among the different education departments as far as the provision of education for the gifted child is concerned;

(vii) the education of the gifted child requires a comprehensive approach necessitating close co-operation between home and school in particular;

(viii) an educational milieu that stimulates the gifted child is of prime importance - such a milieu is not found in a formalized classroom set-up in which the teacher dictates the tempo, the method and even the outcome of the explorations of the child;

(ix) new educational technology offers wide-ranging possibilities for individualized education and creative exploration by the gifted child; and

(x) the gifted child, its parents and teachers need professional guidance.

Let us see if and how the above points can be accommodated in the new dispensation for the provision of education in order to promote the education of gifted children.

## 2. THE STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

With regard to the management of education it has been accepted that education will be managed on a three-level pattern: The first or macro-level of education management is the ministry of education of the central government which is responsible for general education policy in the country. The second level of education management is the departments of education which are responsible for the provision of education to a particular population group within the bounds of general education policy guidelines. The third or microlevel of education management is the schools where education is provided in accordance with the education policy of the particular department of education.

Possible organizational arrangements for the education of the gifted child at the various levels of education management include the following: On the macrolevel the South African Council for Education (SACE), which was created by statute (see National Policy for General Education Affairs Bill which provides for the determination of a national policy for general education affairs within the framework of certain principles and for matters connected therewith, B. 85-84) and which is representative of all the peoples in the RSA, should create inter alia a specialist committee or subcommittee to deal with the education of the gifted child (see Art. 7.1). This committee could advise the SACE on education policy for gifted children on the one hand, and on the other hand it could advise the departments of education on the interpretation of national policy with a view to the implementation of this policy by them. Such a committee would ensure that on the macrolevel of education the SACE and the ministry of general education affairs would give attention to the provision of education for gifted children.

On the meso or departmental level of education, some departments have already created infrastructures to guide the educational activities focused on the gifted child. Apart from interpreting national policy and informing and advising the particular director of education regarding the provision of education for gifted children and the implementation of education policy, such an infrastructure would also co-ordinate all

activities within the specific department of education concerning the education of the gifted child. Such a departmental infrastructure should have direct access to the director of the department concerned.

The recommendation contained in the HSRC Report on Education (HSRC 1981) was that for obvious reasons a co-operative educational service should be developed simultaneously at the national or macrolevel, the second level and the third or local level. This co-operative educational service should include curriculum, educational-technological, guidance, health and social as well as evaluative and diagnostic services. In its White Paper (1983) the Government stated that it was desirable from a costs and manpower point of view that specialized services should also be rendered to their own education departments on a co-operative basis from a central point (White Paper : 14). The principle of such Co-operative Educational Services Centres (SESC's) is left rather vaguely.

Such Co-operative Educational Services Centres (CESCs) - and I would like to make a renewed plea for their acceptance could prove invaluable particularly in the identification of and the offering of special educational programmes to gifted children. Not only could scarce resources be shared, but CESCs could also facilitate the providing of guidance by the more experienced to the less experienced departments in the field of education for the gifted child.

Within such a CESC, regional co-ordinating committees could disseminate information on the education of gifted children to schools, provide and present programmes for these children, organize in-service teacher-training courses, identify problem areas in the education of gifted children and make recommendations to either the departments or to the National Committee on the Education of the Gifted of the SACE.

With regard to the very important contribution of the private sector in the education of gifted children it is important to point out that in the Government's White Paper (p.29) it is stated that government support would be granted to registerable private schools. The Government is currently giving attention to the formulation of a co-ordinated policy for the recognition of the granting of financial support to private

schools. One hopes - and I know that such initiatives are being taken - that this could also imply the accommodation of initiatives, also from the private sector, regarding the education of the gifted.

At the micro, local or school level a school co-ordinating committee should be created (much can be said about the composition of such a committee) to help with the identification of gifted children, to plan, provide and evaluate programmes for these children (these could include special placement in grades, advance placement in tertiary institutions and acceleration), and to liaise with the regional co-ordinating committee.

In this way an education management setup could be created that could play a major role in ensuring that the potential of our gifted children is optimally realized.

3. THE PROPOSED NEW EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE GIFTED CHILD

The proposed modular educational structure, when fully developed, will enable the gifted child to be accommodated within it. Two points in particular need to be highlighted:

(i) Provision will be made for five grades of education differing from each other in respect of the degree of difficulty of the curriculum content offered. One of these grades will offer enriched curriculum content to provide for the educational needs of gifted children and will accordingly accommodate these children in mainstream education. The children will be able to actualize their potential in this enriched grade. The system will also enable the specifically gifted child in the normal grade of difficulty to follow courses in the grade for the generally gifted.

Of even greater importance than the enriched curriculum content is, however the climate that should be created in the grade for gifted children. An environment should be created of maximum freedom and guided stimulation within a framework of clearly defined norms of socially acceptable behaviour, and unconditional

acceptance of the child as an individual in its own right. Creativity should be encouraged and expected of the child, and achievement values should be fostered. The child should be allowed to challenge the obvious and often stated. Questions concerning ultimate realities and important issues should be posed and discussed. Particular attention should also be given to the socialization and leadership potential of the gifted child.

(ii) The pre-school bridging period aimed at achieving school readiness, accepted in principle as a high priority in the provision of education, and ideally suitable for psychological, medical and other screening purposes is also suitable for the early identification of gifted children. Naturally the specialist staff attached to the Co-operative Educational Services Centres (CESCs) should be involved in this early identification activity.

I believe much will be said during this conference on the identification of gifted children. I shall therefore only make a few general comments based on the diagnostic strategy devised by Roux (1984): The early identification of the gifted child should make provision for a first phase in an identification procedure that should be based on proper guidance being given to particularly parents and teachers regarding the manifestations of giftedness to enable them to recognize gifted children. During the second phase the identification strategy should focus on the specific characteristics, intellectual ability, scholastic aptitude and performance of the children, etc. In the next phase the gifted child should be evaluated in terms of interests, creative ability, personality characteristics, etc., in other words the more affective dimensions of the child's personality.

The proposed specialist educationists, school social workers and the school psychologists who will be attached to the CESCs will all be able to play an important rol in such a comprehensive strategy for identifying gifted children.

## 4. SCHOOL GUIDANCE FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

School guidance for gifted children poses peculiar challenges. It should help the gifted child to have a realistic self-image, an own philosophy of life, realistic aspirations in keeping with his exceptional abilities, etc. The basic aim in the guidance of gifted children should be to support their unique individuality and at the same time to encourage creative social relations and ideals.

It is important to remember that not only the school counsellor but the teaching corps in general and the teacher of gifted pupils in particular will all have to help make the school guidance system as effective as possible. This implies demands being made on teachers of gifted children that would otherwise not have been made. This should be kept in mind in the training of all teachers but particularly in the specialized training of those who will have the responsibility for teaching gifted pupils.

Because of the gifted child's superior intellect and his peculiar social and emotional needs, special attention should be paid to his guidance.

## 5. TEACHER TRAINING FOR THE TEACHERS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Gifted pupils in the various categories display in a group context, as well as individually, unique educational needs which must be provided for by means of appropriate educational strategies and special educational programmes. The designing of educational programmes for gifted pupils forms the core of the provision of education for these pupils. Such programmes should cater for the specific educational needs of individual pupils and should be designed for all school subjects.

In order to educate the gifted pupils effectively the teacher should be able to identify these pupils and be sensitive to their educational needs. This implies that a teacher-training course should cover identification procedures, the different phases of identification, information required for identification and the criteria for identifying specific areas of giftedness.

The course should also include the planning and organization of education for the gifted child and the planning of teaching strategies that can guide and support the child in its own intellectual explorations.

The course should make provision for extensive training in curriculum design, taking into account differentiation and individualization. Individualization with regard to the designing of programmes for individual gifted pupils is important as individualized programmes will be necessary to provide for the social and cognitive educational needs of these pupils. Teachers should in their training also be sensitized to the needs of individual pupils and not only to the teaching of a group of children within a classroom setup.

Subjects that should be included in a teacher-training course in respect of designing individualized learning programmes are the following: development of divergent thinking; development of problem-solving skills; development of high-level thought processes through the application and integration of knowledge; techniques and methods of information gathering; etc.

As the success of education for gifted children is dependent on the co-operation of all the teachers at a school, it is essential that teacher-training courses should include modules on the education of gifted pupils. In this way all teachers will be sensitive to the unique educational needs of these pupils.

The recommendation of the Main Committee of the HSRC's Investigation into Education that specially designed advanced courses, preferably as an adjunct to a B.Ed. degree, be introduced in the field of in-service training, should be implemented to provide experienced and adequately trained teachers for the gifted pupils. In selecting teachers for such courses special attention should be paid to their ability to apply a wide spectrum of teaching strategies.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The effective provision of education for gifted children is dependent on an education structure that will create educational opportunities for

these children and a management structure that will give effect to these opportunities. The creation of co-ordinating committees at the macrolevel, mesolevel and microlevel of education will respectively ensure that education for gifted children will receive attention at the highest level with regard to overall decision and policy making, at departmental level with regard to the execution of broad educational policy, and at school level with regard to the practical implementation of policy.

The provision of education can only be regarded as effective if the system provides for the educational needs of pupils. In order to plan and provide effective education for gifted children, their educational needs must be determined by means of a comprehensive identification procedure that will conver as many aspects of giftedness as possible.

School guidance for gifted children should be provided to assist these children towards self-discovery and self-understanding, and to plan their future studies and careers in accordance with their abilities. Proper career planning will enable gifted children to develop their potential to the full.

The success of an educational programme in schools depends on the co-operation of all the teachers. All teachers should therefore receive training on the education of gifted children to increase their awareness of the needs of these children. Special training should be given to teachers who intend teaching gifted children.

When a system of education provision has been formulated and implemented, research to evaluate its effectiveness should be undertaken. The departments of education, universities and the Human Sciences Research Council should therefore do such research on a co-ordinated basis to evaluate the education of gifted children and to assist in the planning of education to meet the changing demands made on the gifted in society.

Research on the education for the gifted underachiever, the provision of educational opportunities for the gifted in the non-formal education dispensation, and on the identification of the disadvantaged gifted child, should be undertaken urgently. Perhaps our overseas guests with their extensive experience in this field could advise us on how to approach these issues.

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